

Romans 4:1-5

Sunday 6/29/2008

Last week, we discussed the 12 doctrines on salvation and how they provide a roadmap for sharing the Gospel. You can sit down with someone, open your Bible, and show them how to be saved. Salvation is based on 12 backbone doctrines taught in the book of Romans. We went through those last week, and you should have them in your Bible today. Start to look through and work through them because they are absolutely essential for understanding.

Today, as we get into Romans 4, we recall that in Romans 3, we basically saw man in his complete sinfulness. It is hard to believe that a holy God would want anything to do with any of us, but by the grace of God, He does. We have been coming to the point in Romans, and everything we have looked at, that focuses on getting God's righteousness. That is the whole concept of Romans. Romans is now opening up and showing us, as New Testament Christians, how we get God's righteousness even though we do not deserve it. That is why we went through those 12 great doctrines last week, to help you understand better how it works.

Now, I am going to open up today, and I want to read Romans 4:1-5. Look what it says:

Romans 4:1-5

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

What he is basically saying there is that if Abraham was saved by works, then he cannot give God the glory for it. He has to take the glory for himself because it was his works that saved him. That is what he is saying here. "For what saith the scripture?" That is my favorite phrase in the Bible. "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

Father, we thank and praise You for the Lord Jesus, and we ask You today to meet with us, give us wisdom and understanding in all that we try to accomplish today. We love You. We thank You, Father, for the Bible that You have given us and for those that showed up today. I know a lot of people are in places today that they ought not to be instead of being here. They thought it was more important to be there than here. But I thank You, Father, for the ones that are here today that have come to hear Your Word. Lord, we ask You now to bless us, and Lord, this is Your day. All the way back in the book of Acts, in the early book of Acts, they set apart the first day of the week. Everything else took second place. The day that You came out of the tomb was the day that nothing else gets in the way; that is where we meet together to preach Your Word. Thank

You for the faithful ones here today, and we pray, Lord, that You will bless us now and give us a good time in Your Word. In Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

Romans 4:1-5 basically says this, and this is how we open this great chapter, because in this chapter, we are going to begin to see how he really begins to define how you and I get the righteousness of God. What he has done here in these first five verses, he has told us that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. But the moment we get to that verse, we have a problem because we have a so-called contradiction in the Bible. Take your Bible and turn over to James 2.

I. The Apparent Contradiction

I want to talk to you today. Basically, I want to show you, because you are going to get into these sooner or later. We have come through a lot of things in the Bible, a lot of things in the book of Romans. Now, I want to show you your first contradiction in the Bible. James 2:20-22. Here is what it says:

James 2:20-22

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

Now, one place tells you that Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith. The other place tells you that it was works that justified him. Of course, now we have a problem in the Bible, and these are called contradictions in the Bible. Romans 4:1-5 clearly states that Abraham was not justified by works. Then we come over to James 2, and it says that Abraham was justified by works.

II. Understanding "Contradictions" in Scripture

In the Old Testament, there are probably about 200 what we call contradictions in the Bible. These are called, in theological circles, problem texts. They are what the scholarly world, and many unsaved people who try to approach the Bible, and many saved people, approach the Bible with. Many people believe that the Bible is just like any other book. I am talking about Christian people. They do not see this book as what it is: God's book, which is completely perfect and without any proven error.

The standard idea today is that the Bible is just like any other book, and the Bible contains mistakes in it just like any other book. That is because they take the position that the Bible is not the Word of God, but it is the thoughts of God; it is the message of God. What they try to get across today is that the individual words or the verses are not important; what is important is the message that flows through it. I am here to tell you this morning that you can forget the message; you will never get the message if you do not get the words.

My position on it is very clear: I believe the Bible is without proven error in it anywhere, shape, or form. I believe there are no contradictions in the Scriptures. I believe that the only contradictory things are people who try to go to the Bible without understanding the Bible; that is where the contradictions come up.

In the Old Testament, I was taught this growing up in the Word of God: there are probably about 200 places in the Old Testament that do not reconcile. You will find where it says one thing, and you go to another portion of the Scripture that talks about the same event, and it will be changed; it will not be the same. Of course, the scholars tell us that that is proof that the Bible is not infallible. The scholars tell us that that is proof that an error was made, or a scribe wrote something down here, and then later on another scribe wrote it down, and because he was not paying attention, he made a scribal error. He did not get it right, and they say, "There is proof that the Bible has mistakes in it."

Of course, out of those 200 contradictions, over the last 35 years of my life, I would say 175 of them could be answered with common sense, which leaves most Bible scholars out of the picture right out of the gate. I think that 175 of them could be answered with just common sense of looking at the context. Of the 25 that remain, I would say that probably 15 of them could be answered by just doing a little investigative work in the Bible, and there are probably 5 or 10 that require some serious Bible study. But I say, not to say that there are no contradictions in the Bible, they are just men who come to the Bible who have an axe to grind against the Bible, so they want the Bible to be like any other book, so they try to find some contradictions in it.

When it comes to the New Testament, and there are places like this, I want you to learn a great lesson in Bible study this morning, because sooner or later in your life, you are going to come up against somebody who has these verses and tries to show you exactly what it is. When you go to the book of Galatians, Paul is still out there on his missionary journeys, and in the book of Galatians, you find that Paul has his—I am not going to say it is his first problem he has, but it is one of the first problems he has. Christ has just been dead and buried and rose again and been back to heaven for 20-some years, and already in Christianity, problems are coming up.

A group of people are coming to this church in Galatia, and they are telling the Christians, "Oh, you can believe in Jesus Christ, you can believe by faith in Christ, but you have to keep the law too, see." They are called the Judaizers, and they are going around teaching the church of Galatia and confusing many young Christians because they are saying that New Testament Christianity is believing in Jesus Christ *plus* keeping the Old Testament law. Of course, Paul deals with that in the book of Galatians, and it is a problem that we find not just there, but even today, and all through the men who try to teach the Bible and lay it out, and people get into it.

In time, you are going to run up against most of these so-called contradictions, and you are going to find that people try to use those to show you that your Bible is unreliable. People will take them, and many times they will build bad teachings or bad doctrines on them. This is why it is so important for you to grow through the Word of God the way that God wants you to. The way I lay out the Word of God to you is a very systematic way that helps you put the Bible together and understand the Bible in a relative way that not only you can apply it to your own life, but

you see how it works in areas of theology as far as making the Bible work for you. In time, if you keep coming through the Scripture, if you keep growing in the Bible, you will get most of these down.

Many of you are doing something that I think is part of what is going to help you as much as anything. We are coming to the place now—we have been here five years, and after five years, you pretty much know what you have in the church. It is pretty obvious after five years; it is kind of like a shakedown cruise, so to speak. After five years, when you start a church, everybody is excited about it, everybody is gung-ho. It is like when we started the Institute; everybody was just, "Yeah, this is the greatest thing in the world!" Last Friday night, half of them did not show up because they found a better deal someplace. The honeymoon gets over very quickly. After five years in a church, you pretty much know what you have. It is kind of like the shakedown cruise, as I said; you know who you can count on to do what and who you cannot.

As you grow in the Word of God, it is so important for you to begin to understand how to deal with situations that come up as the church grows. When you disciple somebody, you are doing more than just trying to get somebody to come into the church; you are helping them stabilize themselves in the Word of God. When you are working with people in the Bible, whether it is on a basic form of discipleship or in the upper levels of dealing with severe problems that people have, your ability to be able to use the Bible is so key. Sooner or later, as you deal with people—and this is the thing that I see happening in so many of your lives, or many of your lives, that I think is a good thing—you have been around here now for a while, you are growing up in the Word of God, and now you are finding yourself in circumstances where either at work or with the people that you are coming into contact with, you are using what you are learning. Some of you are getting into some dog fights, and I think that is good.

Ray and I were talking the other day about how, if a Jehovah's Witness comes to my door, there was a time when a Jehovah's Witness came to my door, and I would work on him for an hour. I do not mess with them anymore. I do what Ray does: I take their literature so somebody else cannot get it, and send them on their way. I do not get into a lot of discussions because at this stage in my life, I have nothing to prove. Now, if somebody comes in on Thursday night and tries to tear the thing up, that is another whole deal. You will see the Army, Navy, and the Marine Corps all come out at one time. But normally in life, I do not care. I know what I believe, and I know where I am at. Because of that, I have a handle on my own understanding of the Word of God. You can tell, like the Bible says, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit," and it says, "Answer not a fool." Some fools do not need an answer because an answer is not going to do them any good.

For you young guys, I think it is great. Nothing like getting in a dog fight and getting your tail waxed three or four times to help you learn. I remember the first time when I really got right with God. I had just gotten out of the Army, and God really got a hold of my heart. Boy, I tell you, I look back at those days and I think to myself, "Wow, the burning desire I had in my heart!" I did not know anything about the Bible; I was so stupid, I did not even suspect anything in the Word of God. But I had this burning fire in my heart to do something for God. The place where I was going to church was much like what we have here: very Bible-oriented, very doctrinally oriented.

Every year at the Stark County Fair, the young people's department, the college and career class, they got a booth up at the fair, and they did a survey. You would just meet people as they walked down the fairway and say, "Hey, we are taking a survey. Would you like to take this survey?" Well, the survey is a trap, plain and simple. The bottom line is, the survey starts out with stupid questions, then it finally moves its way down to eternal questions. Then, when you ask them the last question, you ask them, "Do you know if you die today, you will go to heaven?" If they say no, then you say, "Would you like to know?" If they say yes, then, "Praise the Lord, thank you." They had little booths back there where you went back there and you won people to Christ.

I went home that night when I knew this was happening. I wanted to do something for God so desperately. I went home that night, and we used to pass out those little tracts called "A Simple Plan of Salvation." You have probably seen them. They have the great little Romans Road in them. I still have my red Bible. Every Bible ought to be red. I still have my red Bible, and I went home, and I put all those things in there, a Romans Road. I even—I will show it to you sometime—I even numbered it. I only had to know where the first place I had to go; everything was numbered and told me where to go next. I had those big outline things in, and I was ready. I wanted to do something for God.

I looked back at that, and I looked at how sincere I was in what I was doing, even though I did not have much inside of me to know what I was doing. How God must have looked at that! But at the same time, God looked at it saying, "Brother, for the first time in your life, you are really doing something, and I am glad, but there is more to it." I remember the first night I went there, I won two people to Christ. Oh, I was high as a kite! I said, "Billy Graham, look out, here I come!" I had visions of a big old bus going out on the road, "Bob's Evangelistic Ministry," and all that. I was ready to rock and roll.

I thought—this is the honest-to-God truth—as I was walking home that night, and this is the funny thing: when we get to heaven, we are going to see the really goofy conversations we had with God when we were young Christians, and unfortunately, we will see some of the goofy ones we had as we were older Christians. But I remember walking that night with my Bible in my arm. Barb lived right around the corner from the fairground, and I was walking over to her house. I was so happy, I was so proud. I had won my first two people to Christ. Like most young Christians, I got to the point where I was stupid.

I am walking down there, and I am saying to myself—this is the absolute conversation I had—because everybody in that class that I was going to, that church, really knew their Bible. I was a new guy. When I came to the great conclusion that night as I walked over to Barb's house, I said to myself, with my Bible in my arm, proud as I could be that I won people to Christ that night, my first souls won to Christ, and I said to myself, "You know, I do not even think I have to worry about studying the Bible that deep. I think I am just going to be a soul winner." To me, it sounded like a great plan. I said to myself, "I am just going to win people to Christ. I am going to save a lot of time studying all the deep things in the Bible like everybody else does. I am going to just win people to Christ."

I walked into her house that night. I do not think I said it to her, but I had a plan, and I was really happy. I went back the next night, Bible in hand. Boy, I was ready to go, my little clipboard. I went in there, and I walked up, and I said, "Sir, we are doing a survey. Would you like to take a survey?" He said, "Well, sure." I asked him all the dumb questions first, then I got down to the punch line. I was even getting the style down; I was flowing, as they say. I came down through there, and I said, "Do you know for sure if you die right now, you will go to heaven?" He says, "No, I do not know for sure. I do not think you can know." I said, "Well, would you like to know?" He smiled. He says, "Well, sure."

I said, "Right back here." Can you just see me? "Right back here, right this way to the kingdom!" I could hear the angels singing, "Hallelujah, hallelujah, one more for Bob Belt!" "Come on in, come on in!" He walks in there, and he sits down in a chair like this, and I sit across from him. I open my Bible to that first place, the only one I knew, and I had it ready to go. I said, "Now," and I asked him the first question. You know what he said to me? He said, "What about Acts 2:38?" What I had snagged on my line, I thought was a guppy, a little bluegill. "Tag them, bag them, put them in there. I will catch them, Lord cleans them."

Well, I had that night a Jehovah's Witness. That is what I said many years afterwards, even to this night. For the next 45 minutes, he kicked my behind up one end and down the other. We went through it all. Acts 2:38. I had no idea what Acts 2:38 was. I thought, "That is what you had in your house, an axe and a .238." I do not know what it was. I am down there, and he is just beating me senseless. That night, when he was done with me, I was absolutely defeated. But it was a good defeat because God had burst my bubble.

I walked out of there that night making a new vow to God, and that new vow was that I had grown up a lot in 24 hours, and God had shown me my first great spiritual lesson: you cannot do God's work without knowing His book. I made my mind up that night that will never happen to me again. Now I have learned my Bible, and I have had one other search in life: every time we go back to Ohio to visit friends, I try to find that guy. I look for him everywhere. I take out ads in the paper: "Will the JW that waxed my tail in 1972 please call this number?"

My point is this: you have to learn these things. Just going through the motions of what the Bible is without understanding how it works is going to get you in trouble. That is why I like it when I see some of you who are getting into these little scraps with people at work or this or that. You have to keep the right attitude about it, you understand what I am saying? There is nothing better than a sword drill to keep you sharp. You are going to have to learn these things in time. Some of you new people are probably asking yourself, and I understand it, you are probably saying, "Why did God allow passages like that to seem to contradict? Why would He allow it? Is God trying to trick us? Is He trying to make the Bible hard? What is the deal?" Of course, today in this lesson, you are going to learn some great things, not only about the book of Romans and how the righteousness of God is established, but hopefully you will see how, when you deal with these things and you come up against these things, the right way to deal with them.

III. The Bible as a Living Book and the Heart's Attitude

There are a couple of things you want to see here. I am going to talk to you generally about the Bible itself first, and then we will come back and look at this text. You have heard me say this before, but it is a true saying, and it really is something that was profound in my life when I understood the concept. You have heard me say it before: the Bible is the only book in the world that when you begin to read it, it begins to read you. The thing that sets the Bible apart from every other book on planet Earth is that the Bible is a living book; it is alive. Because it is God's book, the Bible says—and this is how I approach it—the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

1 Thessalonians 2:13

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

That is the bottom line. The Bible is the only book in the world where your attitude about that book is absolutely the determining factor of what you get in it or what you get out of it. When you come to the Bible, but you do not believe the Bible, then that is what you are going to get out of the Bible. When you come to the Bible and you believe the Bible is what God claimed it to be and what He said it to be—in fact, the Word of God—then that is when you are going to get something out of the Word of God.

The Bible is the only book in the world that reads everything in your heart the moment you expose yourself to it. It is going down. In fact, the Bible says in Hebrews 4:12 that the Bible discerns the thoughts and intents of your heart. Sitting here this morning, God really understands why you are here today. Sitting right here this morning, that Bible has already discerned deep down in your heart the real true motive of why you were here. As you go out and you work this week and you do what you do in your life, and you either take God with you or you do not, the Bible will determine in your heart; it will discern your attitude of heart. That is why people do not like the Bible.

You can fool me. You can fool your wife or your husband, your mom or your dad, or your friends or whoever, but you cannot fool the Holy Spirit of God who resides in you and in that book. When the two spirits do not line up, there are problems. Of course, the Bible is the only book in the world that you have to have an absolute pure heart when you come to it, in the sense of just believing whatever God tells you and accepting the Bible as the Word of God.

I do not know everything in the Bible, and I guess if you look hard long enough, and there is something I overlook, you could find a place in the Bible that you can throw at me that would seem to contradict. Because my approach to the Bible is this: the Bible is right, and I am wrong, even when I do not understand it. I never take the position that the Bible is wrong. I will take the position that I am stupid. I will take the position that I am wrong. I will take the position that I am blind as a bat, but I will never take the position that the Bible is wrong. The Bible is innocent and will not be killed until it is proven guilty, but it will never be proven guilty. If we do not have something that is absolute, then we do not have anything. That is what the Bible really does.

I have no preconceived ideas about the Bible. If you ever sit down and talk to me at any length of time, you will find out that I am the most open-minded person in the world. All I want is truth. I do not care what the truth is. If the Bible taught me clearly and plainly that I should shave my head, get a robe, and walk around the rest of my life and be that for Jesus Christ, hey, I would get a haircut this afternoon and get a robe tomorrow, and I would be on my way. I do not care. I have no pet doctrines that I want to believe, and I think that is what separates people who come to the Bible with a pure heart versus someone that comes to the Bible with preconceived ideas.

A number of years ago, I was preaching down in Alabama in a church down there, and I held a Bible conference. These people were great people, and they were starving for the Word of God. They had me down for eight days in a row. I would have a meeting in the morning, I would come back and preach an hour and a half in the evening, and then they wanted to have a Bible study for two and a half hours after that. We were getting out until 11:30, 12:00 every night after I had already preached and then hit it again in the morning. I mean, they were hungry. When I got on the plane, I felt like somebody put a vacuum cleaner on my brain and sucked it out. I mean, I was spent. But these people were absolutely hungry.

In every situation, you had the guys that were the wolves that were circling the pack out there. We had a Bible study the first night; the guy never came back after that. But the first night, after we preached, we had a Bible study, and somebody asked me about something in Genesis. I even forget what it was; I think it was the gap or Genesis 6, I do not remember. Anyway, I laid the thing out from the Bible. Well, this guy challenged me on it, and I told him, "You know what? I would just as much believe what you believe as what I believe. I do not care." I said, "The problem I have is I have places in the Bible that I cannot reconcile with what you are trying to tell me." We went at it, and he was getting a little heated, and I thought to myself, "What is he getting heated about? I mean, there is nothing in the Bible I believe that I am going to get upset if you do not believe. I do not care. How does what you do not believe about the Bible affect me? Why would I get upset because you do not agree with me, or I do not agree with you, if that was not something that is your pet deal? I do not care."

Finally, the guy made the telltale statement. He had a buddy sitting there with him, and I was answering the question. Everybody was getting into it; it turned into a real fistfight, and I loved it. This guy says—I heard this guy turn to his buddy—he said, "You know what? I do not care what the Bible says. I know what I believe." That was the telling statement of where he was at. That man had a preconceived idea. He wanted to believe what he believed so desperately, he was willing to get upset about it.

Now, there are a lot of things that I will get upset about, but whether you believe what I believe or not will not be one of them. I believe the Bible has standards for marriage, and I believe if you do not have those standards, your marriage is going to go down the tube. I believe if you do not do what is right with the Word of God, you are going to lose your marriage. Somebody says, "I do not agree with that." Let us go get something to eat. I hear Arthur Bryant's has all you can eat today. I do not care. Do what you want to do.

I believe the Bible has standards for raising your children, and if you violate those things, when they grow up, they are going to give you all kinds of problems because you did not do what was right in their life. Somebody says, "Well, I think we watch Dr. Spock, or we watch this, or we do that. Oh, I read this." I do not care. It is not about me. It does not bother me because I have no preconceived idea. Hey, I would love to speak in tongues. I have no pet peeve against speaking in tongues. I would love to speak in tongues. I would be like Paul; I would speak in more tongues than all of you. I do not have a problem. I think that would be a neat thing.

I would love to heal. I would love to have the power to heal, and the first thing I would do is start plastic surgery on some of you. I would fix some of those glaring things that you have. I would love that. But I would not limit it to here, and I would not go get a tent someplace. No, no, no. And I would not be asking you to pay me to do it and then lock the doors so that you do not get out until I get enough money and have you come up in here. I would not even be here; I would be down at Children's Mercy. If you have that kind of power, what are you doing here? There is a burn ward down there, a cancer ward down there, little kids that are dying that have no chance in life. What in the world are you doing up here trying to move some bucks into somebody's pocket and trying to go where the action is?

If I could heal this morning, hey, I wish I did. You would see me walking down the street with an obituary. I would be hitting every funeral home. You want to make some conversions and believers out of people? Just walk in when their loved one is in their casket and say, "Young man, arise!" And he gets up and says, "Boy, that was tough! Let us go!" They would believe everything you want to say. You do not have to hide it in a tent or behind some building someplace. You can just go out into public; that is what Jesus did. I am not against it; I just do not see any real evidence of it. I am not against anything; I would like to believe anything. I do not have a preconceived idea about the Bible.

My standard idea has been this all my life, and I have lived by this: you show me something that I teach that is wrong, and show me from the Scriptures that it is wrong, and show me the right way to do it, I will drop whatever I believe, whatever I teach, whatever I have taught, whatever I have believed in 10 seconds, and I will pick up the truth and go with it. You know why? I do not care what the truth is, from wearing a robe to raising the dead to healing the sick to doing this to doing that. I do not care what it is; I just want the truth. To get the truth, you can have no preconceived ideas.

If your attitude in your heart is this, you know how young men get into heresies? You see it all the time; you watch it coming, and I can almost see it coming in some kids' lives. It starts because somebody starts believing what some man says over what the Bible says. He starts reading some man's book and quits reading the Bible, and man's concept becomes his concept. Suddenly, you have people who believe in Calvinism today that are so fired up with Calvinism that they will just go off the deep end arguing with somebody. You know why? Because they want to believe that so desperately. I do not care; I would buy it in a second if it was real.

You cannot come to the Bible with a preconceived idea because you have to come to it realizing that that is God's book. In light of what you have, when you look at this, then you have to face

Ezekiel 14. Because when you come to the Bible with a preconceived idea, you know what Ezekiel 14:1-5 says? It says that God took the nation of Israel, who had already had preconceived ideas in their heart about who God was, what God was doing, and what God's plan was. Because they had preconceived ideas that did not line up with God, and they wanted to believe what they wanted to believe instead of what God told them, God took them and deceived them with their own heart. In other words, God gave them a lie to believe. The Bible says, "I will answer those people after the multitude of the idols in their heart."

Do not ever doubt it for a second: God will give you the lie to believe if you want to believe it. He will make it look so real and so good, and down the line, if that is what you want, He will answer you after the multitude of your idols in your heart, and He will snare you in your own heart. If you do not learn that about God in that book, you better learn it pretty quick. That is why you have so many goofy people running around today believing everything that goes on, and nothing is really truth about it. God will give you a lie to believe if you really want one. God took the house of Israel in their own heart, and their heart was already manifested what it wanted to believe; it was not based on truth. The problem today that we have is you have to know truth before you can base what you say or you do on truth. That is the problem.

IV. How to Approach Apparent Contradictions

Here is the second thing. That is the first reason why God puts contradictions in there, or so-called contradictions: He wants to check your heart. That Bible is a meter reader; He wants to read your heart. He wants to put something in there that looks like it does not match, or looks like it is different, or looks like it is wrong, and He wants to see and read your heart, what you think about it. He wants to see if you are going to let some outside influence take from you what the Word of God gives you. That is the first thing He does.

Now, the second thing these so-called contradictions do for us: it is a great way that God teaches us truth. I have never seen in the Bible a so-called contradiction that did not lay out some absolute truth that was just magnified by the so-called contradiction. This is one of them. My stand is the Bible is always right, and I am wrong. You have some people that say the Bible is always wrong, and I am right. My stand is the Bible is right, and I am wrong. If I cannot figure it out, the problem is with me, not with the Bible.

In Bible study, this is called contrast: the things that do not look right. Like in Romans 4, it says Abraham was justified by faith, not by works. You go to James 2, and it says he was justified by works. It does not look right. As I said, in Bible study, this is called contrast: two things that contrast each other. Here is how it works: when you study your Bible, if you are a Bible student, when you study your Bible, you are going to look for things in your Bible that do not seem to fit, and then you are going to ask yourself, "Why is that?" You are going to understand, if I have already laid out that the Bible is the Word of God, there are no contradictions in it. God has put it in that way to either snare somebody with a bad attitude of heart—because we already know now that He will give you the lie to believe if you really want one, and He will take man in his own heart—or God is trying to show you some great truth that is masked in this so-called

contradiction. But you have to go in realizing that the book is God's book, and there are no contradictions in it.

You ask yourself—I remember when I started out, I remember when I started reading the Bible, I started comparing Scripture with Scripture. I have a list of them in my old Bible, things I went through. But you ask "why" when you see these things. Ask "why."

- Why does Matthew 5:1-10 seem to contradict Romans 3:10-18?
- Why does Hebrews 10:31 seem to contradict 1 Peter 5:7?
- Why does Acts 2:38 seem to contradict Romans 10:9-10?
- Why does Matthew 25:1-10 seem to contradict 1 John 5:11-13?
- Why does 1 John 3:9 seem to contradict 1 John 1:10?
- Why does Mark 16:16 seem to contradict 2 Timothy 4:20?
- Why does Romans 4:1-5, where we are at now, seem to contradict James 2:21?

That is how you learn the Bible. They are in there for a reason:

1. They are in there to snare men in their heart who come to the Bible with a preconceived idea about God's Word and God's truth.
2. For you and I who get past that, God always has one of the most incredible truths laid out that you can glean from it, and the answer is found in the apparent contradiction.

When you study the Bible, you are not looking for mistakes or contradictions in the Bible, but you are seeking—here it comes—you are seeking to reconcile passages that do not seem to line up with other places in the Bible. You do that by comparing Scripture with Scripture and rightly dividing the word of truth and setting the right context. This is called, in 2 Timothy 2:15, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

"Needeth not to be ashamed" is a reference to the judgment seat of Christ. You have nothing to prove to me. I mean, I may have some expectations for you if you are going to be a leader in this church, because the church has some in the Bible. But when it comes to studying the Bible, you have nothing to prove to me. Your approval rating on your study is to God. You flunked at the Institute, and people come up all the time, "Well, I am really..." You do not need to apologize to me. Somebody says, "Oh, I feel like I let you down." You did not let me down. I love you, let us go eat. You did not let me down; you let God down. You are to "show myself approved unto Him," not Bob Alexander. You did not let me down at all. He is the one that saved you. He is the one that called you. He is the one that gave you the book. I just try to help you figure it out. You did not let me down because you quit or you got a better deal. You did not let me down; you let Him down. That is the problem.

You have to study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman. It is going to take work. You are going to have to dedicate some time in your life for that work, working in the Word of God,

learning that Bible. That necessitates you are going to have to prioritize your lives. It necessitates you are going to have to decide, "What do I want to do? Do I want to do this, or do I really want to learn the book?" That is what it comes down to. You have nothing to prove to me, but you do have it to prove to Him, and the only way you do that is by rightly dividing the word of truth.

The key is this: if you do not hear anything else I say today, hear this. The key you are trying to accomplish by rightly dividing the Bible and studying to show yourself approved: first, you recognize that there are places in the passage that seem not to go together. At first glance, they are not reconcilable. One says this, one says this; they obviously seem to contradict. Now, we know there are no contradictions, and we know that the Bible has no errors in it. The key is you are to study to show yourself approved as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.

Here is what that means. Here is the key. If you do not hear anything else I say, hear this: you and I are to study to find out why both verses—Romans 4, James 2; Matthew 5, Romans 3; Hebrews 10, 1 Peter 5; Acts 2, Romans 10; Matthew 25, 1 John 5; 1 John 3, 1 John 1; Mark 16, 2 Timothy 4—both verses, your job and my job, is to study to show yourself approved that both verses are correct and mean what they say the way they read, even though they appear to be in contradiction.

I am going to say that again: your job and my job is to study to find out why both verses in both cases are absolutely correct, and they mean what they say the way they read, even though they appear to contradict. You study to put each verse in its right context, in the right Bible framework, to teach the doctrine that God intended the verse to teach, without changing anything, without going back to the Greek, honoring the text, trying to jam two verses together to try to make it work. That is what is called serious Bible study. Serious Bible study is studying to show yourself approved, being able to get into the Bible where you face these situations, because they are going to be thrown at you, that you get to the place that you know more about the Bible than any other thing.

Here is the problem we all have. Now, I do not have this problem; I had it at one time. I fixed it in my life. My job is to get it fixed in yours. But here is the problem you have. Most of you—I do not know, we all do different things for a living, and you all have expertise. You all do, some of you do things really well. Bob is the best tile layer in all the world. If you ever saw his work, he did. When I went to Rome, I thought sure he did the tile work there in the Sistine Chapel. He is a great tile man. Steve can fix anything that goes wrong in your house, your yard, your dog, your thing, whatever the case may be. Lightning takes your roof off, he will have it up by tomorrow, whatever needs to be done. Oh, he does not do it; he has guys he tells to do it, but he does it. He has great expertise.

Jimmy can listen to your car. I watch you people. "Jimmy, there is something wrong in my car." You know what Jimmy does? Jimmy goes out and says, and I love this, "Take the hood up. Start it up. Your timing chain is off." Whoa, I love that! I love the guys that when a lady is stuck along the freeway, or in a parking lot, and she cannot get it going, and she has got three little kids in the back and all of her groceries, that the man walks over and he says, "What is the matter, little lady?" "My car will not start." "Let me pop the hood." And this is the part I love: "Try to turn it

over." "Uh-huh." I love this part: "You have a screwdriver? Thank you." Big, long. He will take that screwdriver, stick it down in that engine somewhere, and do something with it, and he leans around the hood, "Try it now!" And it starts. I tried that one time. I burned a screwdriver in half, the fan belt cut my finger off, and I almost got killed by the handle flying by my head. I do not know what you touch, but I am impressed. I do not know what you do to stick it down there and make that thing turn over. Then she looks at you like, "Oh, my hero!" You are to me too, Mr. Screwdriver Man.

Some of you are great. What did you do? Brian and Christy can figure out a sound system. Whatever you can do. I am so stupid. My VCR went out last week. I hate to tell stories on myself, but they are good stories. My VCR broke last week. So me, Mr. Fix-It-All Man—I mean, I do not know a lot of—I have patience. My wife will tell you I have more. She says, "I do not know how you get your patience for people." She said, "You are the most patient man with people." But that is where it ends. I am not patient with my dogs. I am not patient with things. My way to fix it is a hammer, and if that does not work, a bigger hammer.

My VCR broke, and I know I have to go buy a new one, and that kicked me off to begin with, because they do not fix things. So I know what I have. That morning, I got me a blank sheet of paper, pulled my TV out, and made a complete diagram of the back of—what are you laughing at, Sandy? All right, you come over and hook it up then! I made a diagram of the complete back of my TV, and every plug, and in the back of the cable box, in the back of the TV box, and made a diagram of everything fit in, and I am thinking to myself, "It is not that bad." So I go get it, bring it home, take it out of the box, take the old one back in, and put it up there. The first thing I realized: none of the plugs are the same. The only one I just got. So then I go by the process of elimination. "I will just start here. This one is the video; it is going to give me a picture." So I just start going in each one. Nothing. "Listen to the audio. Maybe I will get some sound." Nothing. "Where does the antenna go?" I have more wires back there than I know what to do with. I cannot figure it out.

I call Danny. I said to Dan, "I am really sorry, Danny. You know what? I can figure out the eternal decrees of everything in the Bible, but I cannot put a VCR back together." He comes over, he looks one thing at it, and he says, "Hey, you know what? You have this wire." And I said, "No, I have a screwdriver. I was going to try that, man." I said, "Well, I went up, found the wire." He plugged that right in there, and he said, "There it is." I am impressed with stuff like that.

Some of you do a good job. Some of you are great fishermen; you go out and get your limit all the time. Some of you are great hunters. When it is turkey season, it does not matter, you get your turkey. Deer season, you get your deer. Well, that is the way it works. You always see deer in turkey season and see turkey in deer season, but you never see them in the right season. Yeah, I have that one figured out now. You are incredible. I see you guys walking in the woods; you have antlers hanging down on your thing. You know what they do with antlers? They rattle them out in the woods, and supposedly that means two deer are fighting over a female deer, so they all come and watch, and then you shoot the biggest one that shows up. Now, my luck, I take two

antlers out there, a deer would think I was a deer with antlers, and he would gore me to death, and I would be in the thing. That is just the way it goes. I do not do those things.

But I am telling you that my job is this, and you all do things well, and some of you have got to this point. But here is what my job is. Here is what I have already done. I do not know anything. I do not know how to fix a car. When my lawnmower stops in the middle of the company yard, I am ready to sell it. A guy said to me one time when I took my car in, he says, "You have a short circuit." And I said, "How much is that going to cost to make it longer?" I do not know how to fix anything. I am good at breaking things. When I trim my yard, my bushes, oh man, that looks like a drunk did it. I cannot get it straight, and I like it. Somebody said, "Well, your bushes..." I said, "That is the angle, look, man, what is your problem? That is the new thing today. What is your deal, man?"

My job is to get you, whatever you do for a living, my job is to get you to know the Bible better than what you do for a living. That is my job. I do not know anything better than the Bible, and I do not know a lot about the Bible, which shows you where I am at. But I do not know anything better than the Bible. I gave it up a long time ago. I realized that nothing else really matters. I know you have to make a living, I know you have to do it, but it is called priorities. My job is to get you, whatever you do, and I am sure you are good at it, my job is to get you just better in the Bible than you are at what you do for a living. I mean, that meticulous thing that some of you do, the way it is done, some of you have done it, that is the same thing I want you to be able to do with the Bible.

When some of you people do a job, paint a room, paint a house, do whatever, you fix whatever, you put together, it looks immaculate in what you do. Well, I want that same kind of quality in your Bible in time, and it takes some time to get there. That is what you have to do. That is what a serious Bible study is all about for a serious Bible student. I am not a Bible scholar; I have never claimed to be, nor will ever claim to be. I am not a Bible scholar; I am a Bible student. A Bible student never graduates; he continues to learn and adds to what he knows. A Bible scholar thinks he knows it all when there is nothing else he can be taught. But that is where you have to get in your life.

My job is to study to put each verse in the right context within a Bible framework to teach the doctrine that God intended the verse to teach without changing anything. In other words, you go in and you see a house that is in a mess, and you know how to fix it. You see a shrubbery that is in a mess, you know how to fix it. You see a car that will not run, you know how to fix it. You see this, you see that, you know how to fix it. You see a problem in your life and somebody else's life, or an issue in the world, or something you have to deal with, and you automatically see how to fix it. That is the key.

You will learn that when you come to the Bible in serious Bible study, putting things together like this, not all words mean the same thing in every context. You realize when you find the word "saved" in the Bible, it does not always mean saved from your sins and going to heaven instead of hell. You realize when you find some of these words have two or more definitions in them. When you find the word "temptation" in the Bible, it does not always mean in a bad sense that

you are tempted with some sin. Read the word "damnation" in the Bible; you realize that damnation in the Bible every time you find it does not mean a man going to hell. There are two kinds of damnation. The word "perfect"—every time you find the word "perfect" in the Bible, it does not mean sinless perfection.

How about the law? You will find in the book of Romans he used the law four different ways: there is a law which is the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments; there is a law which is the first five books of the Bible; there is a law of sin; and there is a law under sin and death. They are all different. That is serious Bible study: by rightly dividing the word of truth, by getting to know the Bible better than you do anything else in life. I am not saying quit your day job. I am saying if you put the same kind of time and effort into learning what the Bible says and how to rightly divide it as you have done to get where you are at in what you do in your career, we would not be having this conversation.

Take the word "dead." There are four kinds of dead in the Bible. There are real dead people, the ones in the cemetery. Then there are unsaved people who are dead in trespasses and sins. And then there are saved people who are dead to Christ, and then there are saved people who are dead in Christ. Do you know the difference between somebody dead in Christ and somebody dead to Christ? Four different kinds of dead in your Bible.

V. The Two Proofs of Salvation

This is why, very frankly, most of God's people will never learn the Bible. It is just like the Institute; it sounds out really good when it starts, but then when the work gets in, it is like Thursday night Bible study. It is like starting a church; everybody gets excited, but then as time goes on, things take over and become more important, and that is why God's people never make it. You see it in everything, I do not care what it is. That is why most of God's people never learn the Bible for themselves; they will always be dependent on somebody else for learning the Bible, and that is a very dangerous situation.

One of the things I hated about traveling around the world over the years that I have been around the world, and I have been many, many places, is that there are certain kinds of people who have abilities to learn languages. I am not one of those people. Certain people are just adapted that they learn other languages very easily and very quickly. I am not one. But what I hated about going to Central America, South America, or places in Europe, is that you always had to be dependent on somebody else to speak for you. That always made me feel very vulnerable. It always made me feel like, in human nature, they are saying something, and you are saying to yourself, or your people over there, you know, I would just preach, and there would be two women over here speaking in Spanish, and they would be talking back and forth in their Spanish, and they would be laughing. I am thinking, "What are they laughing at? My message?" Now, they probably told each other a joke about their dumb husbands, and they are laughing at that. But because I am not in the conversation, what are you going to do? I am already paranoid. I said, "Where is the baño?" And I hope that was the bathroom. When the guy brought me a banjo, I knew I was in trouble.

You are very helpless. You are in a situation where you cannot communicate. You are dependent on somebody else. You would go to a restaurant. I tried it one time, "Oh, I can handle this." You ought to see what I got. Whatever it was, it was looking back, and I do not think it was dead. You cannot even order off a menu. In some of the places, for us stupid Americans, when you go to a McDonald's, they have the sign, everybody knows "Big Mac." But how many years can you eat on Big Mac? Try to order a steak. Try to order spaghetti. Try to order something that really gets you. You cannot. You are always dependent on somebody else because you do not know the language and the culture that you are in. Therefore, you are dependent, and therefore, you are vulnerable.

With the Bible, it is the same way. Until you learn to learn that Bible on your own, you have to be dependent on somebody else, and that makes you vulnerable. That is why some of you have the problems you have. Your whole life is spent running from person to person to person, asking them what they think you ought to do, and then wondering why your life is in a mess. Your whole life is built on the fact that you cannot figure it out for yourself. Hopefully, you are going to roll the dice just like I did, and hopefully, if I ask this lady to order me this up here and point to it, who understands a little bit of broken English, she is going to order the right thing. Your deal is that you are hoping that you are rolling the dice that whoever you tell your problems to, or whoever you ask your help from, they are going to give you the right thing. In here, you are probably safe, maybe, but out there, you are not, because there are a lot of things flowing around there, and you need to learn how to use the Bible for yourself, or otherwise, you are going to be vulnerable all your life. That is a terrible feeling.

You need to know why you believe what you believe. You need to know how to work that Bible. You need to know, and that is why the moment you come in and you get saved, if you want to be disciplined, we will bring you up. We will bring you through the books of the Bible. We will have everything you need so that you can become self-sufficient within yourself. But I am telling you, you have to come to the point where you are not vulnerable anymore, that you know what you believe and know how to make that Bible work for you, and you understand the things that I am talking about this morning.

This discrepancy here that we have is a great example of what I am talking about this morning. It is a good lesson for the Bible student, whoever you may be, of taking this example and looking at it and seeing how, as we come to Romans, we already know Romans is justification by faith, and yet we get thrown a verse, a flyer verse comes in, somebody throws it at us. Put yourself in a situation: you are discipling somebody, or you are teaching Bible study, or you are out someplace, and somebody says, "Hey, would you start a Bible study for us at work? I have five or six people." And you say, "Yeah," and you think they are all friendly people until you get in there, and then you realize that somebody put a target on your back, and they are going to try to whack you in front of everybody. Do you think it will not happen? I guarantee you it will happen. Imagine yourself faced with this issue.

The first thing you want to do in any established situation—and this is true of every one of these, you take one, you do them all the same way—the first thing you have to do is establish a context. Let me just say this to you: when it comes to these so-called contradictions, here is a second

thing you want to hear if you do not hear anything else: the answer will always lie in the context. Find the context, you have got the answer. You do not have to look any farther than that; that will save you a lot of time.

The first thing you want to do is establish a context for both passages. We have a contradiction, or a so-called contradiction, here between Romans 4:1-5, which says he was saved by faith, and James 2:21-23, which says he was saved by works, or works were involved. Now, let us look at Romans 4. Come back to Romans 4, and I will show you how we get our context. I want you to see this because you are going to have to learn this. You cannot be like me the day I got right with God and went to the Stark County Fair. You cannot just say in life, "I am just going to win people to Christ and do the basics." It is not going to work for you. God wants to put you in situations where you are up against it all by yourself. He wants to make you a cut above the rest. He wants to train you harder, train you longer, train you faster, and give you more insight so that you can take it, so that He can put you in any given situation in this city or around this country, around the world. I know you will stand fast because you know what you believe.

Let us get the context here. Romans 4. Let us read verses 1-3 again:

Romans 4:1-3

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

I explained what that verse meant a minute ago. Now look at verse 3: "For what saith the scripture?" Here comes your context. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Now, verse 3 says, "What saith the scripture?" And then he gives you the context of where that is found. That context is in Genesis 15:5-6. That quote in Genesis 15 that he quotes in verse 3 is the day that Abraham got God's righteousness by believing what God said about his seed and what God said about the stars. If you go back and you read that passage, you will not find any works involved whatsoever. So, the first thing we do is find the context of Romans 4:3, and we now know it is Genesis 15:5-6. That is the day he got God's righteousness, and there were no works about it. He simply believed what God said, and the Bible says it was counted to him for righteousness.

All right, now let us look at the next thing: James 2. Some people, because they have preconceived ideas, are in such a hurry to prove what they believe, they lose the ability to read. Now look at James 2 and set the context here. Pick it up in verse 20:

James 2:20-22

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

All right, there is your context. The first context over there in Romans 4, the context of that is Genesis 15. The second context you have down here is Genesis 22. Do you know how many years are between Genesis 15 and Genesis 22? He offers up Isaac. Genesis 15 is where he believes God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Genesis 22 is when he offered up Isaac. Romans 4 is talking about the context of Genesis 15. James 2 is talking about the context of Genesis 22. How much time between the two? 21 years. 21 years!

The first thing you did, you established a context: they are not the same event. There are 21 years between these two events. Are you going to tell me that he got saved in Genesis 15 when he believed God's righteousness, then he got saved again in James 2? They are not the same event. But like I said, sometimes you want to prove your point so bad, you lose your ability to read. Sixth-grade English. Here is what you have: Abraham was saved; he got God's righteousness in Genesis 15 by faith without works. Then, through the process of 21 years, look at James 2:22: "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" You know what he did for those 21 years? He perfected his faith.

Have you ever studied the life of Abraham? He starts out after he gets God's righteousness in Genesis 15. He cannot believe God for anything. God says, "I am going to give you a seed." He was 90-some years old; his wife was 80-some years old. You just do not have kids at that age normally. I understand his skepticism. Sarah laughed, so when he named the boy, they named him Isaac, which means laughter. The Bible says that he could not believe, that he had a hard time believing what God said. He just got saved, but he could not believe what God told him about seeds. So what did he do? He listened to his wife, and he went and took Hagar and went into her and had a seed through the wrong line and brought forth Ishmael and thought he could fix it.

How many times have we done that in our life? How many times have we gotten saved, and we see what God wants us to do, but because we cannot trust God, for whatever reason, we are afraid, we do not understand, we do not know, we do not come to church, we do not do this, we do not grow, but we make a dumb mistake in our life, and it costs us a lot? That is what he did. If you study his life—and we are going to study his life in depth here in a couple of weeks—you are going to find that he goes through a process, and that process is one where he makes some mistakes. God keeps coming back and dealing with him, and through the process of 21 years, Romans 4 says he was justified by faith when he believed what God said, not that he got God's righteousness 21 years later. He had perfected his faith. Now he believed God so much that when God—back here, he could not even believe God what He told him about his seed.

Right now, some of you cannot believe what God tells you about your own personal life. Right now, some of you cannot believe what God tells you about your marriage. Right now, some of you cannot believe what God tells you about your kids. Right now, some of you cannot believe what God says about your job or your circumstances or the problem you are going through. If you work at perfecting your faith—and you can do it a lot quicker than 21 years—but if you

work at perfecting your faith, you will come to that point like he did, that the works that he was doing justified his faith. That is why the Bible says, "Faith without works is dead."

VI. The Fulfillment of a Christian Life

Abraham was saved and got God's righteousness in Genesis 15 by faith without works. Through the process of 21 years, he perfected his faith by what he did. You know what you have here is a great truth. I do not know if you have grasped it, coming out of this so-called contradiction or not, but here is what it is, and this is going to be a rough one for some of you. The only proof you have that you are saved is two things. It is certainly not what you say. I do not believe anything anybody tells me anymore. Somebody says, "Well, I am a Christian." Why do you live the way you live? Somebody says, "Well, I am saved." What were you doing where you were at last night? Somebody says, "Well, I am a child of God." Why do you do the ungodly things that the world does? Do not go by that.

You are not saved because you have the right Bible. You are not saved because you have a big Bible. You are not even saved just because you know the Bible. Those are all things that the average person goes by. "Boy, he sure knows the Bible." And that means what again? Everything is relative to a reference point in life. The guy says to me, "Well, he is a good man." A guy was talking about another pastor one time, and he said, "Well, he is a really good man." And I said, "Compared to who? Adolf Hitler?" It is all relevant to your point of reference. "Well, you really did a good job." Compared to what? Those statements mean nothing without a point of reference. The fact that you say you are saved means absolutely squat without a point of reference.

What you have in this contradiction, in this great lesson, once you get past how God deals with people with the wrong attitude of heart, the great lesson you have here is what God looks for and what you have that is your reference point. It is not the fact of what you say. It is not the fact that you have the right Bible or even what you know about the Bible. The only real proof you have that you are saved is two things. I am sorry if this offends some of you, but I do not know what to do with it.

The only real proof you have that you are saved is two things:

3. What has changed about you when you got saved? That is it. Do not tell me you are saved and still do the things the world does. Do not tell me you are saved and still be party to all that. What is different? What changed about you the moment you got off your knees and walked into the newness of life? What changed about you?
4. Now that you have changed, what are you doing for God? What is your work?

If I got sick next week and I could not preach—I know you have been around here a year or so, but suddenly, around five years now—could you carry the ball? If I have somebody that has problems, do I have the confidence in you that I know that you could do it? What do you do for God? What is your purpose here this morning? Like the person I told you last week, a while back, a person said, "Well, we are going to leave the church." And I said, "Okay." I cannot think of anything that has to change or I have to cover if you are not here. You know why? You do not do anything. We just take your seat.

It is not about what you say, ladies and gentlemen. It is not about having a right Bible or what you know about the Bible. What changed about you the day you got saved? And what are you doing for God now that you are? I told you last week, this church strives to make a difference in your life. Everything I do is for one purpose: to make you better at that Bible than anything else you do in life. I may not always do it right. I may fail sometimes, but that is my motive and that is my goal. Right or wrong, my job is to make sure this church makes a difference in your life. Your job is to make sure your life makes a difference in this church. Only two things you have.

This is the great truth that comes out of this. Abraham got saved in Genesis 15, and in Genesis 22, it shows that now he has perfected his faith, and now his works show it. He has perfected himself. He was just like we all were the day he got saved with God. He could not believe God either. But through a process of time in his life, he came to the place where he could give God the very thing that he loved the most. I am just going to say this right now: if you do not give it to Him on your own, God will always test you with the thing you love the most. That is His nature. You know why? Because He wants you to love Him the most, and rightly so.

In Genesis 15 and 16, he cannot even believe God for the promised seed and gets into the mess with Hagar, producing Ishmael. In Genesis 22, he believes God so much he just puts the kid down on the altar and takes the very knife in his hand. If God would have stopped him, he would have killed him. His faith was perfected by the works that he did. God said one time, in the Gospels, "If you be faithful to the little things, I will make you rule over the many." You know how you get to that place where you can be like that with God, like Abraham was? You begin to do something for God. Anything. Step out by faith. Let God take you and use you and mold you and perfect you. Perfecting your faith is a great key in the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Your perfecting is for the work of God. There are two types of works in the Bible. Romans 4 is talking about the work that man says you have to do to get saved, which we know does not exist. James 2 talks about, after you are saved, a process that you prove your faith by the works that you do. Hence, James 2:20: "Faith without works is dead."

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

That is the verse that tells you that works cannot save you. But what works do is the only proof you have that you have really been saved. I do not know what to tell you. I wish it was different. I wish I could say just because you say you are saved, that means something. Look around the world. Everybody claims to be a Christian. Everybody. Are they? It is not what you say. It is not what you have, the right Bible, or even what you know about the Bible. What really is the proof

that you have been saved? It is what changed about you the day you got saved. What old habits have you given up? What old habits are you trying to give up? What are you saying, "I am not going to do that anymore because I want God to use me"? And then, what are you doing for God?

We have people in this church who have been here for almost four or five years. They do nothing more now than they did when they walked in. I do not know what to tell you. I have some things stirring in my heart that I do not know how to really get out, and I am even hesitant to say it because I do not want to say something stupid. "Well, that is easy for you to say, but I cannot, I do not know that I can do that."

You know what I like to do? Because I know what happened. We are five years into this thing right now, and everybody is happy with what you have. You get the best Bible in the world, if you do not mind me saying that. You get everything you want. You get an hour of my time every week. You have come to the point where, "What else is there?" This is where the little things, where you have it so good, you start to pick on the little knick-knack things that do not mean anything.

You know what I am really contemplating doing? I have not decided I am going to do this yet. I am really contemplating doing one week, just telling everybody this Sunday, "You know what? If you have been in this church for a year or less, you come next Sunday. I am going to minister to you. Everybody else, go find some place to go next week. Take all you young people who have been here for six months, a year, give you that break. Everybody else, go find another church next week. Go find another place. Go in when the pastor says, 'Now, who are you?' You tell him, be honest with him, 'My pastor sent me here because he wants me to check your church out. Maybe I want to go here.'" Do all you have. You have Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday to find a place that you think you might be better in. I am serious. I would rather have 20 of you that were dedicated to that book than 150 of you that just want to play games.

Now, that sounds cruel, does it? But that is where I am at. It will not sound so cruel at the judgment seat of Christ. I am not really worried about what you think anyhow, because sometimes we get spoiled. Sometimes we get satisfied. Sometimes we get so much good stuff. As the Bible says, "The full soul loatheth the honeycomb." You get so much Bible, so much this, so much that, and you sit around like a pig in grease in a frying pan, and you just boil, and the fat comes off, and nothing ever gets done. You know what you need to do? You need to go out there and find you another church for a week and just see if they will do you what you get here. Then the next week, who wants to come back? Come on back. And we will figure it out from there.

I will tell you what. The times are too tough. The urgency of the hour is too great to keep on playing this game that I am going to go to Old Paths, but I am not really going to get in or get out. I will not tell you what the second thing I am thinking about because I am just... But that is all we have. That is all we have. I know how churches are. I have been in them all my life, and this one is no different than anybody else. You come to the place where you come up in this church, and you get a little responsibility, and you just think, "Well," and it does not mean anything to you. You do not do what you are supposed to do with it. You are supposed to be a

leader, but all that kind of stuff goes on, and you just stand by and watch. You know why? Because you are gutless. That is why. You are gutless. You will not stand up for what is right. You will not stand up for God. You will not stand up for this church. You are just gutless.

I want to tell you, it is not about what you say. It is about what has changed about you and how you have perfected your faith. The first thing I do when I took a church, wherever I was, it began with two things: one, build a core base of leaders, because that is crucial. And the next thing I do is try to train my replacement and look for a guy or a couple of guys that down the line, somebody said, "If something happens to me, the church will not be left in a lurch." But you have to begin to take and build a core of leadership. But let me tell you something, leadership is not about getting a name tag that says, "I am Bob Alexander. Oh, I am a leader." It is what has changed about you. It is about what you do for Him. It is about how you prioritize the rest of your life. It is how you give to this world. This church makes an impact in your life. You ought to make an impact in this church.

I hate the fact that on Thursday night, if somebody wants to get saved, I have to use three or four people. You know what my worst fear is? My worst fear out there is that those people are not going to be there that night, and I am going to be left with two or three people who want to get saved, and nobody I have confidence in can win them to Christ. Now, why is that? If I wanted to have a beer with you, I would just send them to your house. You could have one there. Or you could go out and maybe have a cigarette together, or maybe go smoke some dope. But when it comes down to the Bible, I am limited. I do not like that. I am vulnerable.

After you are saved, a process that you begin to prove your faith by your works. You have four different kinds of dead people in the Bible. We probably have three different kinds in here today, probably two for sure. You have dead people who are unsaved. Maybe we have somebody here this morning who is unsaved, I do not know. Dead people, you are unsaved; you are dead because you are dead in the trespasses of your sin. We have real dead people; they are in a funeral home today, they are in the graveyard.

Then the next two dead people are Christians. You have Christians that the Bible says in Colossians 3:3 are dead, and their life is hid in Christ.

Colossians 3:3

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Then you have a lot of God's people who are dead, not in Christ, but they are dead to Christ. You say, "What are you talking about?" I am talking about faith without works is dead. Did you ever look at this thing? It says down here in James 2:23:

James 2:23

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

How was that Scripture fulfilled? You go back and look at Romans 4, and then go back to Genesis 15. What part of James 2:23 is not found back in Genesis? I will tell you what part: the

part about being God's friend. That was the fulfillment of the Scripture. The fulfillment of your life and my life is simply this: you start out getting saved by grace through faith plus nothing. Then you begin a process of doing something with God as you change your life from what you once were to what God wants you to be. Through the act of perfecting your faith, you become God's friend and fulfill your life in Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of that verse was not the fact that he got saved when he got God's righteousness; it was that he became God's friend.

That, my friend, is a process, but it is not a process you can bring your beer with, or your packs of cigarettes, or your dope, or your this, or your that. It is not like that. You have to get rid of those things and make up your mind you are going to dedicate your life to what God wants you to be. And the Scripture was fulfilled. The Christian who is dead in Christ is someone whose life is hidden in Christ. He is someone who comes to a point where he has followed what God has said. He has gotten saved, and he has begun to put through the process of his life.

I am going to tell you right now, you will never fix whatever issues you have in your life until you get in that book. You are wasting your time thinking you can fix it without getting in that book and getting the help that you need, and then learning how to get it for yourself in time. You are wasting your time. A Christian who is dead in Christ, as Colossians 3:3 says, is somebody that is saved, and they are in Christ, and everything they do is in Christ. Every decision they make is in Christ. Every place they go is in Christ. Every person they deal with, every relationship they form, it is in Christ, and Christ is in this book.

Then you have some of God's people who are dead to Christ. You are saved, but you could not hear God speak to you if your life depended on it. Your life is so full of your stuff, your things, what you want to do, how you want to do it, the way you want to do it. You are so fixed in your mind that it is your way, and you are going to have what you want. Forget what God wants. God saved you. God shed His blood for you. He put you in heaven, and now you have taken it for granted and said, "Thank you." You use God as a fire escape. Where you have God's people that are dead in Christ, you have a lot of God's people who are dead to Christ. The Holy Spirit of God could not move them. Preachers cannot use them. They are dissatisfied. They come to churches like this week after week after week. Nothing changes in their life. Nothing impacts them. Nothing moves them. Nothing changes them. They are all about them: what you want, what you ought to do.

I would rather have 20 Christians who were dead in Christ than 150 that were dead to Christ. Because it all comes down to the end of the day, my friend, what changed about you and what you do for God. See how that thing works? There is no contradiction in the two passages. He perfected his faith to a point he could give God Isaac, and he became God's friend. He believed God in Genesis 15, and it was counted to him for righteousness without works, but through a process of perfecting his works, he fulfilled that Scripture, and he became God's friend.

How do you become God's friend? Not by coming to church. You do not become God's friend because you drop a little money in the offering plate. You become God's friend because you dedicate yourself, knowing He is holy, knowing you are getting out of your life those things that do not make you like Him. Abraham was saved and got God's righteousness in Genesis 15, and

for 21 years, he goes through the process of learning to trust God. You may be saying yourself today, "Well, he had 21 years. I do not even have three or four." Let me tell you something, pal. If you know anything about the Bible and you bother to come the last couple of nights, you do not have 21 years. If I were you this afternoon, the first thing I would do after church, I would not even stop eating. I would go down to Barnes & Noble or one of these bookstores and get into the Cliff Notes section and find a book in a Cliff Note that says, "How to Be God's Friend in a Hurry."

In James 2, he now has come to the point in his life where he can trust God with what he loves most: Isaac. Through this act of giving Isaac to God, which is a work that was perfected from the very beginning when he could not believe what God said about Israel, Abraham now shows the inner faith that produced the right work and gave him the relationship with God that made him God's friend. The right faith will always produce the right work. By doing so, he fulfilled the Scriptures. The end result of us getting God's righteousness was becoming God's friend.

I want to tell you, when we study his life here in a couple of weeks, or whenever we get there, Abraham was a great example in the Bible. And the Scripture was fulfilled. Let me ask you a question: what will be the fulfillment of your life? That is the thing you have to leave here with today. I do not care who you are, where you are, what you know, what you think you do not know. The bottom line is this: what will be the fulfillment of your life? When it is all said and done, the last thing you read about Abraham's life, the Bible says that God said, "He is My friend." And he got to be God's friend through a process of perfecting his faith. "That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." God has a good work and good works that He wants you to perform. The only way you are going to get that is to enter into that process of perfecting that faith that you have in Him. What you can trust Him for today and what you can trust Him for next year. Every year, every six months, every week, every day, you ought to be able to trust God for more tomorrow than you can today. Perfect unto all good works.

VII. A Call to Action

If you are saved here this morning, all I can say is this, and then I am finished. It frustrates me what you have here and what you do not do with it in your own personal life. I am just going to be honest with you. You say, "Well, I will not come back." I do not know what to tell you. I really do not. I am at the point, this point, where I am just about ready to tell them to forget the building, and we will just stay here and clean house, and we will have plenty of room. Why should I go into debt? Why should we go into moving over there and doing all that when a quarter of the people in this—maybe half the people in this—really do not care and do not do anything anyhow? What is this? You mean to tell me you do not have something better to do on Sunday morning than to come and take this abuse? I apologize to you. We will probably never come back again. I am not like this normally. I am sorry, Ed, was not it? Forgive me, Ed. I did not mean to do this. Heaven came down, and God got a hold of the back of my neck. I am normally very quiet and nice, and I walk around, pat people on the head. I am sorry, buddy. You got in on a family day today, and I did not plan it, but I am tired of it.

I am tired of you looking at God and the Word of God and the times that we live in. I cannot do this all by myself. I cannot. Some of you are going to, and it takes more than just stepping up there. We all teach the Bible. It takes taking care of what is going on here. It takes you being a leader here, not just when you get up there in front of somebody. It takes you standing up against your own family, standing up against your friend, taking God's side against what is right and what is wrong and saying, "You know what? That is what it says. You need to change your ways." "Well, I am not your friend anymore." You know what? I have a better friend than you anyhow.

You are either dead in Christ this morning, or you are dead to Christ. You are either dead in Him, and you are on the way, and you are going to do what God wants you to do, and you are drilling your way to getting this thing down, and you examine yourself, and you cover my back and protect this church and do everything you have to do, or you are dead. You are dead to Christ. You cannot get anything from Him. You are just going through the motions. I do not even know why you are here. I do not even know why you bother to come. You do not do anything. You do not win anybody to Christ. You do not bring anybody. I do not know what you give, but you probably do not give anything. I do not care about that. But I am just saying this place means nothing to you. You mean to tell me you do not have something better you can do on Sunday morning than to take this? What is your purpose?

I am telling you, we are living in a world that we think that—and I know what it is—you get so much. You have Thursday night, you have all the books of the Bible, an hour of my time. You have Institute, you have everything you want. You are just so fat and sassy now that you just kind of have to be there. You are just kind of bloated out. You Institute people, I put the test together yesterday. There are 155 questions on that test. If you miss 10 of them, you are going to be looking for another place. I have had it. I am tired. I work my butt off, striving to solve all your problems and help all your little goofy things and work through you, which I am not complaining about at all, and then you do nothing with it. You just come here and sit like a frog in a hailstorm. You just come here and blink around and walk in and shake hands and walk back out again.

God has a work for you. He has a work for us. The only way you get that work is to perfect your faith. I will help you do it. But I will tell you one thing: you need to go out of here today. You just decided in your own heart either you are dead in Christ or you are dead to Christ, but it is one or the other. If you cannot figure it out, you want to come and ask me, I will be glad to help you out. But that is it. There is no contradiction in the Bible. What a great truth! When you come to that place and somebody says, "Ah, there is a contradiction in the Bible," no, there is a great truth in the Bible. You were saved by faith plus nothing. 21 years between those two passages, 21 years where a man stumbled and fell and worked through the process of where he went and what he did and got to the place where finally he could give God the thing that he loved the most.

You know why you will not honestly, honestly—here it comes, and I am done. I am not going to go any farther than this because I will not improve on what I am about to say. I just hope I do not forget. You know why you will not go any farther? You know why you will not go where you need to go? I will tell you why, and I do not know what it is; you have to answer that. There is something in you that you love more that you do not want to give to God. I do not know what

that is. You have something that you love more than you love Him. You do not want to give it up. You want the best of both worlds. You know what that makes you? That makes you a Christian who is not dead in Christ. You are dead to Christ. You have to figure it out.

I just know this: we are either going to do this and do it right, or we are not going to do it. It is just that simple. I have been around the game too many years, and I am not playing it either. We are going to do it, or we are not going to do it. We are not going to continue to go on and just pretend we are when we are not. You better decide in your heart this week. You better decide. I tell you what, I came that close this morning to just getting up and telling everybody, "Next week, you go find another church." Other people, a year and a half down, you stay in augmented reality because you are victims in this, and you are just innocent. You get this thing, I will work with you and help you. Everybody else needs to go out there and find you a better deal. This one obviously is not working for you. But now I am not going to do that because I shot my mouth off and said it. It probably worked out better this way at home.

But you better decide what you are going to do. Better decide what we are going to do. God has given us the absolutely greatest opportunity in these last days. If you know anything about the Bible, you know what I am not. God has given us the absolutely greatest opportunity. Maybe you are willing to. I am going to tell you right now, listen to me. I have to close this thing down and go start someplace else and start all over again. I will do it. I am not going to play the games where we pretend we do it when we do not. It is just that simple for me. Maybe it works for you; it will not work for me. I am just being honest with you. I know some people have problems. You come in with issues. I am willing to work through whatever situation you have, whatever problem you have. I will help you one way or the other. I will stay with you until the cows come home. I do not care. I am about solving problems. What I am not about is playing games. You better decide if you are in Christ or not. That is where the bottom line is. Every head bowed, every eye closed.